

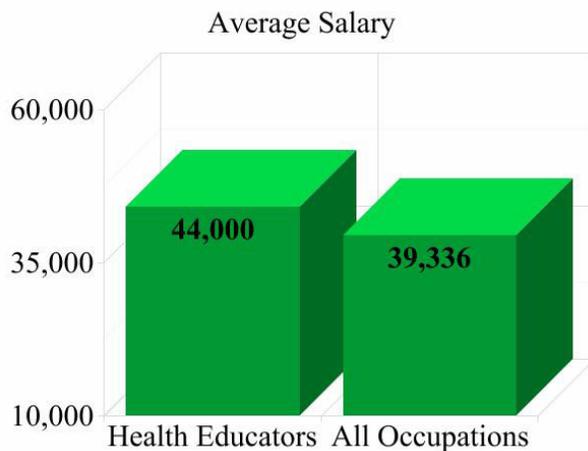
## Health Educators

Career Profiles provided by StudentScholarships.org

### WHAT THEY DO

Health educators work to encourage healthy lifestyles and wellness through educating individuals and communities about behaviors that can prevent diseases, injuries, and other health problems.

Health educators attempt to prevent illnesses by informing and educating individuals and communities about health-related topics, such as proper nutrition, the importance of exercise, how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and the habits and behaviors necessary to avoid illness. They begin by assessing the needs of their audience, which includes determining the appropriate topics to cover. For example, they may hold programs on self-examination for breast cancer to women or may teach classes on the effects of binge drinking to college students. Health educators must take the cultural norms of their audience into account. For example, programs targeted at the elderly need to be different from those aimed at a college-aged population.



After assessing their audiences' needs, health educators must decide how to meet those needs. Health educators have a lot of options in putting together programs. They may organize an event, such as a lecture, class, demonstration or health screening, or they may develop educational material, such as a video, pamphlet or brochure. Often, these tasks require working with other people in a team or on a committee. Health educators must plan programs that are consistent with the goals and objectives of their employers. For example, many nonprofit organizations educate the public about one disease or health topic, and, therefore, limit the programs they issue.

Next, health educators need to implement their proposed plan. This may require locating funding by applying for grants, writing curriculums for classes, or creating materials that would be made available to the public.

Generally, after a program is presented, health educators evaluate its success. Methods of evaluation vary based on the program in question. For example, they may ask participants to provide feedback using a survey about the program. Through evaluation, health educators can improve plans for the future by learning from mistakes and capitalizing on strengths.

Although programming is a large part of their job, health educators also serve as a resource on health topics. This may include locating services, reference material, and other resources and referring individuals or groups to organizations or medical professionals.

Even though all health educators share the same overarching goal, their duties can vary depending on where they work. Most health educators work in medical care settings, colleges and universities, schools, public health departments, nonprofit organizations, and private business.

Within medical care facilities, health educators tend to work one-on-one with patients and their families. In this setting, a health educator's goal is to educate individual patients on their diagnosis and how that may change or affect their lifestyle. To this end, they may explain the necessary procedures or surgeries as well as how patients will need to alter their lifestyles to manage their illness or return to full health. They may also direct patients to outside resources, such as support groups, home health agencies, or social services. Often, health educators work closely with physicians, nurses, and other staff to create educational programs or materials, such as brochures, Web sites, and classes. In some cases, health educators train hospital staff about how to better interact with patients.

### EDUCATION REQUIRED

Entry-level health educator positions generally require a bachelor's degree from a health education program. These programs teach students the theories and methods of health education and develop the skills necessary to implement health education programs. Courses in psychology, human development, and a foreign language are helpful, and experience gained through an internship or other volunteer opportunities can make applicants more appealing to employers.

Graduate programs in health education are often offered under titles such as community health education, school health education, public health education, or health promotion. These programs lead to a Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Education, or a Master of Public Health degree. Many students pursue a master's in health education after majoring in or working in a related field, such as nursing or psychology. A master's degree is required for most health educator positions in public health.

## Health Educators - Continued

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### OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

Health educators spend much of their time working with people and must be comfortable working with both individuals and groups. They need to be good communicators and comfortable speaking in public as they may need to teach classes or give presentations. Health educators often work with diverse populations, so they must be sensitive to cultural differences and open to working with people of varied backgrounds. Health educators often create new programs or materials, so they should be creative and skilled writers.

### HOW TO ADVANCE

Health educators may choose to become a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES), a credential offered by the National Commission of Health Education Credentialing, Inc. The certification is awarded after candidates pass an examination on the basic areas of responsibility for a health educator. The exam is aimed at entry-level educators who have already completed at least a bachelor's degree in health education or are within 3 months of completion. In addition, to maintain certification, health educators must complete 75 hours of approved continuing education courses or seminars over a 5-year period. Some employers prefer to hire applicants who are certified, and some States may require health educator certification to work in a public health department. However, many employers do not require their workers to have the certification.

A graduate degree is usually required to advance past an entry-level position to jobs such as executive director, supervisor, or senior health educator. Workers in these positions may spend more time on planning and evaluating programs than on their implementation but may need to supervise other health educators who implement the programs. Some health educators pursue a doctoral degree in health education and may transfer to research positions or become professors of health education.

### WORK ENVIRONMENT

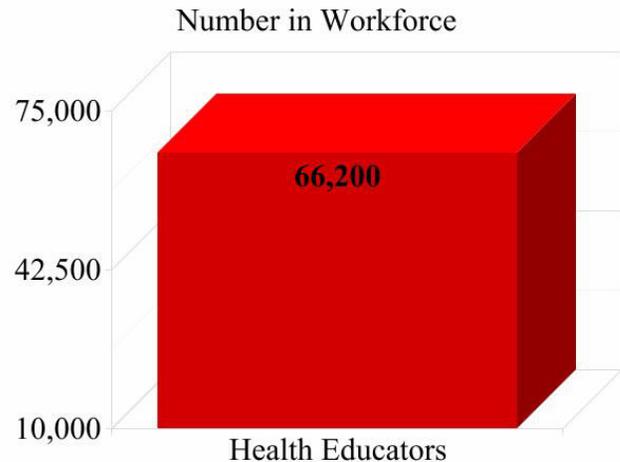
Health educators work in various environments based on the industry in which they are employed. In public health, nonprofit organizations, corporations and businesses, colleges and universities, and medical care settings, they primarily work in offices. However, they may spend a lot of time away from the office implementing and attending programs, meeting with community organizers, speaking with patients, or teaching classes. Health educators in schools spend the majority of their day in classrooms.

Health educators generally work 40-hour weeks. When programs, events, or meetings are scheduled, however, they may need to work evenings or weekends.

### JOB GROWTH

Employment of health educators is expected to grow by 18 percent, which is faster than the average for all occupations through 2018. Growth will result from the rising cost of healthcare.

The rising cost of healthcare has increased the need for health educators. As healthcare costs continue to rise, insurance companies, employers, and governments are attempting to find ways to curb costs. One of the more cost-effective ways is to employ health educators to teach people how to live healthy lives and avoid costly treatments for illnesses. There are a number of illnesses, such as lung cancer, HIV, heart disease and skin cancer, that may be avoided with lifestyle changes. Health educators are necessary to help the public better understand the effects of their behavior on their health. Other illnesses, such as breast and testicular cancer, are best treated with early detection, so it is important for people to understand how to detect possible problems on their own. The need to provide the public with this kind of information will result in State and local governments, hospitals, and businesses employing a growing number of health educators.



Demand for health educators is expected to increase in most industries, but their employment may decrease in secondary schools. Many schools, facing budget cuts, ask teachers trained in other fields, such as science or physical education, to teach the subject of health education.

Job prospects for health educators are expected to be favorable, but those who have acquired experience through internships or volunteer jobs will have better prospects. A graduate degree is preferred by employers in public health and for non-entry-level positions.